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ESSENTIALS AND NON-ESSENTIALS

PROFESSOR D'OOGHE'S ADDRESS BEFORE THE LATIN CLUB, DECEMBER 2, 1905

In Two Parts—Part II

As the first year develops the grammatical sense, principally through the study of forms, so the second develops it through syntax. In the second year, too, the translation of the first classic brings with it that peculiar training in the vernacular which no other discipline can give. Prof. Johnston, of Indiana, in his excellent monograph on "Teaching of Second Year Latin" is quite correct in laying great stress upon idiomatic translation. The translation of the review may well be regarded as the supreme test, and, if thoroughly well done, is proof of much labor and pronounced linguistic ability. I doubt if most teachers make enough of this; and let me recommend especially the handing in of written translations of selected passages. I shall never forget, during my student days in the University of Bonn, an address given by Prof. Usener to his Classical Seminar. Dwelling on this special point of the disciplinary value of making a careful written translation, he said he was even then for the third time writing out in his best style Cicero's oration for Archias. Here was a man ranking among the very first of European classical scholars, past his sixtieth year and apparently at the very acme of literary culture, spending precious hours of his closing life in training himself by means of this exercise. How much more is it incumbent upon us to make use of it in training our students.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without uttering an emphatic word of protest against so called literal translation. Apart from the fact that there can be no such thing—for to upset the idioms of one language into the words of another is not translation at all—I believe that no one thing has brought the study of Latin into disrepute more than this vicious practice. Prof. Stanley Hall, in a recent address on poor English in our schools, charged this weakness among other things, to what he called "baby Latin"; meaning by that term a training in Latin which makes no rigid demands in English and which not only permits slipshod rendition, but sometimes even demands the violation of every law of good English by calling for a 'literal translation'. Of course you know better in New York, but in our state I know of schools where it flourishes; and it is defended on the ground that it prevents ponying. If it be a choice between evils, I should prefer the pony to the literal translation; but surely every teacher knows that a vigorous line of questioning on construction will unseat the rider from his steed.

Presumably I have made clear what seem to me the essentials in the second year. Other lines of parallel work which the context of Caesar suggests—interesting as they are—must be placed among the non-essentials. By these I mean such topics as Gallic geography—customs—and antiquities; the Roman

art of war—contemporary Roman history, etc., etc. Occasionally I see models of Caesar's bridge and Roman triremes and engines of war made by some enterprising Caesar class. I am far from wishing to discourage work of this sort, but if the class that made them was at the same time using Caesar-English in translation, we have a clear instance of disdirected energy. A recent instance falling under my observation was of a Caesar class which was working out complicated military evolutions worthy of a graduate of West Point, but which translated B G II i, as follows: "When Caesar was in hither Gaul, so as we have shown above, frequent rumors were brought to him and he was being made more certain by the letters of Labienus also, all the Belgae, which we had said to be the third part of Gaul, to be making a conspiracy contrary to the Roman people and to be giving hostages among themselves", almost as bad a bit of translation jargon as Professor Lane's famous skit "Concerning a Youth who was Unable to Lie", which runs as follows: "A certain father of a family to whom there was a sufficiently large farm, moreover a son in whom he especially rejoiced, gave this one for a gift on his birthday a little ax. He exhorted him greatly to use the weapon with the highest care, lest it might be for a detriment to himself. The youth promised to be about to obey. When it was necessary for that one, on account of business, to seek a certain walled town situated not far, this one, the ax having been hastily seized, departs into the garden, about to cut down each most flourishing cherry tree. That one, his home having been resought, inflamed with wrath, the servants being called together, asked who might have been the author of this so great slaughter. All were denying, when this one, running up to that one, "Truly, by Hercules", said he, "O my father, I am unable to lie; I, myself, cut down the tree with that little axe which thou gavest to me for a present".

Nor let us forget in our zeal for syntax in the second year that the immortal and incomparable commentaries offer much material for ethical and aesthetic training, and that Caesar was a master of style. What school boy whose eyes have been opened to these things, can forget the desperate valor of the Nervii, the exalted patriotism of Ambiorix, the tragedy of Vercingetorix, the valor of Quintus Cicero and the strenuous manliness of the tenth legion. The teacher who finds Caesar's narrative uninteresting lacks red blood in his veins. And under it all lies the mighty personality of the imperator himself, the greatest Roman of them all—a man of blood and iron, but withal of wonderful personal magnetism and irresistible charm, whom Cicero for good reason placed at the head of the orators of his day. Essentially a man of action, however, rather than of words, he did not love eloquence for its own sake nor strain after artificial rhetorical effects, but used language merely for what it could accomplish. In many ways Caesar approaches our own national

ideal and his character appeals strongly to the American youth. Picture him as the handsome young Roman, fastidious in dress and all his tastes, the trained athlete, the graceful horseman, of remarkable self-control in a dissolute age. Let their imagination seize on this picture and carry them further to the time when his inflexible will, indomitable courage and extraordinary gifts had made him the world's greatest soldier, statesman, and man of letters. This personal touch which many students of Caesar never get, does much to lighten many a weary hour of labor.

The student who has spent his time to the best advantage during the first two years will come to the third with his grammatical sense well developed by rigid attention to forms and syntax, and with great strength in the vernacular, gained through careful study of vocabulary and idiomatic English translation. The work in Cicero should be so directed as to develop all these powers further; but especially the last.

Many teachers continue the severe drill in syntax, which is absolutely necessary in the second year, through the third and even through the fourth. Some do this because of mental inertia. It's easier to keep on asking the same questions. Others do it because of a mistake in judgment, not appreciating that the centre of gravity should be changed and that what was the first essential in the second year becomes secondary in the third. The text books are also largely to blame, many of them continuing to dispense the commonplaces of construction—such as that means is expressed by the ablative and the direct object by the accusative—impartially through the whole course. It is bad enough to have to use Caesar as a *pons asinorum*, but what of an editor who sees nothing in Cicero's eloquence and in Vergil's melodies excepting variations of case and mood! Some knowledge of contemporary Roman history of political institutions and of Roman topography are necessary to an intelligent appreciation of Cicero; but when this knowledge has been obtained, the burden of the emphasis should be laid on the translation, which should now be not merely idiomatic but in good literary style. Here again I consider the handing in of written translations of great importance, and with it the study of synonymous words, of which the orations furnish so many examples. There can be no doubt that this indirect method is more effective in cultivating a good English style than the ordinary practice of writing themes. When a boy is set the task of writing a composition, he spends two-thirds of the time in chewing his pencil and thinking of something to say. After the members of the family have given him a few ideas, he has scarcely time to scratch down the allotted number of words and hand them in. To the style of his production he can give no thought, and has no thought to give. In making a translation from the Latin, the subject and substance are all furnished, and undivided attention can be given to the language and style in which the thoughts shall be clothed.

Another exercise which has been found very helpful for both languages is the Latin declamation of selected passages. The feeling for Latin as a living language is assisted thereby and interesting parallels offered between Latin and English style.

If the three years of linguistic and literary training which precede Vergil have borne their legitimate fruit, the student is prepared to appreciate, to

some degree at least, the beauty of poetry, and to imitate the poetic style with some success in his translation. That seems to me the chief purpose of reading Vergil. That this result is not attained in most cases I am well aware, and it is to be ascribed to failure in the preliminary training. Pupils who are allowed to murder Caesar and butcher Cicero will commit even more atrocious crimes when it comes to so beautiful and delicate a masterpiece as the Aeneid. But with proper training students can produce poetic prose that would be a credit to any one.

The feeling for the beauty of poetry springs largely from an appreciation of its rhythm, and that is why I feel sure that the beauty of Vergil can never be revealed without extensive metrical reading—so extensive that students will read thus easily and naturally. But here, unfortunately, we find ourselves in a dilemma. How shall we scan? What was ictus in Latin verse? What is quantitative prominence? How are we to treat the prose accent? Shall we elide or slur? We can all remember the time when these questions had not been raised and we took unalloyed delight in saying, "Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris". And what fine scansion we thought we had, and how our pupils caught the swing of the verse and felt the heart beat of the great poet! Truly, where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.

Now doubt has entered in:—

"He doth bestride the narrow world
Like a colossus; and we, petty men,
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves".

In other words, some timid souls, since eating of the tree of knowledge, have ceased scanning, with enormous loss to the poetic appreciation of Vergil. *It is essential that Vergil be scanned.* Just how the Romans scanned it, no one knows, and the lack of definite information is such that probably we shall never know all about it. Amid all the uncertainty of detail, there is fortunately no disagreement or doubt about the fundamental point, that the movement of the verse is rhythmical. Some years ago at a meeting of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club this matter of scansion was under discussion. There were present representatives from Cornell, Wisconsin, Chicago, Michigan and other great universities. One after another they gave what they considered the proper scansion of a selected ode of Horace. There was enough difference in detail to give plenty of occasion for heated strife and argument, but what interested me most was that in all the diversity, there was in every case a rhythmical movement. Now it seems to me that the practical thing for each one to do is to study the question carefully and then, from the facts which seem to him worthy of acceptance, adopt a scheme for scansion and use it boldly. You will not be perfectly right, but you will probably be as near right as anyone, and you will have saved for your pupils and yourself the noble melody without which an appreciation of Vergil is impossible.

And now to summarize all that I have said in a few sentences. I believe that failure to secure valuable results from the teaching of Latin is due largely to misdirected energy—a dwelling on non-essentials. The two essentials I believe to be the training in the vernacular, both from the linguistic and the literary side, and education in things of the spirit—the good, the true and the beautiful.